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MAR 20 1936  
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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, March 6, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "PRUNE TALK." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Let no one ever say that Aunt Sammy would not speak up for a real bargain in food. She would never intentionally miss saying a word for any good buy in food. But sometimes she is a little tardy. So today she is ready to apologize for not speaking up long since for the prune. This is a big year for prunes. And long ere this we should have been talking over the many good ways to use the ample supply of prunes on the market.

The prune is a friend that has had its ups and downs in the world. Time was when it endured scorn and unkind remarks from many misguided people. You have probably heard it referred to as "the boarding-house prune." And some mistaken people gathered from that that the prune had no place on an epicure's table.

Then along came the nutritionists and set the prune up in the world where it belonged. They announced that prunes and other dried fruits are low in cost and high in food value. They pointed out that the prejudice against prunes came from wrong methods of preparing it.

Here's what you buy in food value when you invest in prunes. You get valuable mineral content, especially iron. And most of us need more iron-rich foods in our menus. Then, you get natural fruit sugar -- a wholesome form of sweet for everybody in the family especially the children. Third, you get laxative properties. Fourth, you get special fruit flavor that gives variety to meals.

To be sure, prunes and other dried fruits don't rank very high in vitamin content. They lack the vitamin C that many fresh fruits contain. But if your meals are well-planned, you'll get your quota of vitamin C from such rich sources as tomatoes and citrus fruits.

Maybe you are wondering now why prunes ever became unpopular when they had so many qualities to recommend them, just why prejudice against them ever arose at all. I'll tell you why. People didn't prepare them to develop their fine flavor and attractive appearance. Whenever you find a general prejudice against a good food, you can make a guess that the fault lies with the cook. Many a good prune suffered dire maltreatment at the hands of careless cooks. To begin with, prunes often missed the washing they all need -- a hot-water wash before soaking. Then, most prunes had to soak too long and in too much water. Or they had to endure too much cooking. And finally most of them were stewed with so much sugar that they came out of the kettle sweet to the sickening point. I suppose many a housekeeper argued: "Why bother to take care in preparing such a cheap food as prunes?"



Isn't that mistaken reasoning? After all, when you have a bargain in foods, why not make the most of it? Why not bring out its best flavor and make it look as attractive as possible? No use telling the family that prunes are good for them unless the prunes are appetizing.

The object in soaking and cooking any dried fruit is to make it look and taste as much like cooked fresh fruit as possible -- that is, to restore the moisture of the fruit and make it tender. Sometimes dried fruit is so tender that it needs only soaking, no cooking, and then is ready to use. Some dried fruits are best with just a little cooking and no soaking. Some need both cooking and soaking. The secret of success, you see, is not to overdo either cooking or soaking. That is what makes an unappetizing mush of the fruit.

When the foods people at the Bureau of Home Economics tried out various methods of preparing prunes, they reported that different prunes needed different treatment. Some were so tender that they needed no cooking -- only a few hours' soaking. After that they were all ready to serve "as is", or to use in pie, or salad, or pudding. Other prunes were best when soaked in hot water for an hour, and then cooked gently for half an hour. All prunes need washing first thing. Most need no more water for soaking than enough to cover them. And to save flavor and food-value, use the same water for cooking that you soaked them in. The foods people also reported that too much soaking, too much water for soaking or cooking, violent boiling, and stirring during cooking all make prunes lose their shape and become mushy, and also lose flavor.

Tart prunes generally taste best with a little sugar added, but not too much. A pinch of salt brings out the flavor of any prune dish. If you want variety in flavor, you can add a slice of lemon or orange when you are stewing prunes. The tart lemon flavor is especially good with very sweet prunes. Or, add a little spice like cinnamon or clove. Prunes are delicious cooked with other dried fruits, too. Prunes and apricots make a good-looking and delicious combination. You can stew prunes and apricots together, or bake them in a casserole. You can put them together in a mold of jelly or use them in pie or pudding.

Suppose I suggest now a few good prune dishes that you might work into your week-end menus. How would you like a different relish to go with the Sunday roast? Try spiced prunes. Wash and soak some large prunes. Then simmer them, maybe 15 or 20 minutes, with a little sugar and some spices tied in a bag -- whole allspice, whole cloves and stick cinnamon. Add a little vinegar and cook 10 minutes longer until the sirup is fairly thick. Remove the bag of spice.

For a delicious and inexpensive dessert, try a mold of jellied prunes. Stone and cut up tender, cooked prunes. Then add them to a well-flavored lemon gelatin mixture. Serve with plain or whipped cream.

Plain chilled prunes, stuffed with cream cheese or cottage cheese are salad favorites. Set them in the curves of a crisp lettuce leaf along with grapefruit or sliced pineapple.

That's just a start on prune ideas. But don't forget that prunes are a bargain. Thrifty listeners, please take notice.

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